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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000854

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [AEMR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [SENV](#) [TPHY](#) [TSPL](#) [APEC](#) [TW](#) [XE](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN DISASTER REDUCTION CENTER EXPECTS MORE  
CROSS-STRAIT COOPERATION, WORRIES ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

REF: 08 TAIPEI 00236

Classified By: Economic Chief Hanscom Smith for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) This message contains an action request. Please see paragraph 9.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Taiwan's National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (NCDR) expects to broaden an already solid base of international cooperation in the future, including with its counterpart agency in the PRC. Interaction with the mainland in the field of disaster prevention and reduction has already included sharing satellite imagery and data, as well as frequent academic exchanges. Separately, NCDR hopes to reinvigorate cooperation with FEMA and worries that the weather-related effects of climate change may overburden Taiwan's urban infrastructure. END SUMMARY.

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NCDR IS A "BLACK ORGANIZATION"  
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¶3. (SBU) The NCDR is one of 11 agencies under the National Applied Research Laboratories of Taiwan's National Science Council (NSC). It is staffed by 60 research scientists and 20 administrative staff, as well as a network of 20 advisors in universities island-wide. These advisors are the NCDR's "eyes and ears" in the field, assigned with responding to disaster sites and relaying information back to NCDR headquarters in Taipei. Although the NCDR is funded through the NSC, its legal authority to exist comes through the Executive Yuan's National Disaster Prevention and Protection Commission. NCDR Deputy Executive Secretary Li Wei-Sen refers to the NCDR as a "black organization" because its funding and lines of authority are unclear even to many in the Executive and Legislative Yuans. Li notes that this sometimes leads to confusion when deciding who can assign the NCDR with its various missions. He expects a planned restructuring of Taiwan's executive agencies will both clarify the NCDR's location in the policy structure and double the NCDR's scientific staff.

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FOREIGN COOPERATION IS GROWING  
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¶4. (SBU) In a recent meeting with ESTH officer, NCDR Director Chen Liang-Chun and Deputy Executive Secretary Li separately pointed with pride to the growing number of international cooperative agreements and memorandums of understanding the NCDR has signed in recent years. These include MOUs with the University of Hawaii's Pacific Disaster Center (2008), with Japan's National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention (2007) and Real-Time Earthquake

Consortium (2007), and with Korea's National Institute for Disaster Prevention (2007). The Government of Vietnam recently approached the NCDR to sign an MOU for cooperation in disaster preparedness. Deputy Executive Secretary Li notes that Vietnam would benefit from Taiwan's expertise and advanced technical know-how in this field, while Taiwan would earn "friendship" and another avenue for foreign cooperation.

Li added that Vietnam hopes the NCDR can fund capacity building programs under the proposed MOU, but Li explained that the NCDR is not a funding agency. In addition to MOUs, NCDR has cooperative research relationships with universities in the U.S. and elsewhere, and hosts international conferences, such as the December 2007 2nd International Conference on Urban Disaster Reduction and the September 2008 APEC Workshop on Large-Scale Disaster Recovery. A conference this September will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the devastating 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake, which killed 2,455 people and caused nearly USD 10 billion in damage. NCDR Director Chen forecasts expanding international linkages for his agency, and added that because the NCDR is staffed by scientists, it has increased flexibility and space to work internationally.

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SHARING WITH PRC PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY  
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15. (C) Deputy Executive Secretary Li told ESTH officer that the relative lack of political considerations in the NCDR's work allows it to cooperate successfully across the Taiwan Strait. He noted that during the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, NCDR provided satellite imagery on a continual 24

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hour basis to the PRC's National Disaster Reduction Center of China (NDRCC). This was done through a file-sharing protocol on the NCDR website and was initiated with a phone call from the Taiwan side. Li claims that his PRC contacts accepted Taiwan's assistance very quickly and with no apparent bureaucratic interference. The imagery came from Taiwan's FORMOSAT-2 satellite, which Li states has a resolution of 2x2 meters in black and white. Li added that Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau routinely provides satellite imagery and data on approaching typhoons to the PRC. An end-of-year "official visit" from the NCDR to the NRDCC is planned, which accompanies an already high volume of cross-Strait academic cooperation on disaster issues.

16. (C) Deputy Executive Secretary Li added that his PRC contacts are particularly interested in learning about the recovery phase of disaster planning, and opined that the PRC's disaster preparedness system is weakest in the area in pre-disaster evacuation. While praising the ease of recent cooperation with the PRC in his field, Li lamented the high rate of staff turnover at the NRDCC and said he cannot get a straight answer from his NRDCC contacts explaining this phenomenon.

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NCDR WANTS MORE COOPERATION WITH FEMA  
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17. (SBU) Looking forward to the September Chi-Chi earthquake conference, NCDR principles are enthused that FEMA NPD Deputy Administrator Timothy Manning is slated to attend the conference. Director Chen noted that much of the NCDR's success is attributable to FEMA, which served as the source for NCDR's disaster reduction system. However, according to Chen, after FEMA was folded into DHS in 2003, the previous close FEMA-NCDR cooperation was reduced. Chen would like to reinvigorate cooperation with FEMA, particularly through cross-training and study opportunities. This request echoes the sentiments of Chen's predecessor (reftel). Deputy Executive Secretary Li added that the NCDR's biggest weakness is its incident command system and critical infrastructure protection program, and NCDR would like U.S. assistance in

addressing these areas. The NCDR is also in the process of developing models to quantify costs/benefits of disaster prevention in Taiwan in order to make the value of NCDR's work more readily apparent to the public and policymakers. Li believes discussions in this area with U.S. counterparts would also be useful.

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CLIMATE CHANGE TAKING TOLL ON INFRASTRUCTURE  
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18. (SBU) NCDR International Affairs Research Fellow Sophia Lee explained to ESTH officer that climate change is driving weather-related phenomena that negatively affect Taiwan. She and Deputy Executive Director Li argue that models clearly show climate change is behind intensifying typhoon activity over the last twenty years and is also increasing rain intensity in general. Li says that most urban sewer systems in Taiwan were not designed to handle the intense bouts of rain that are more frequently striking Taiwan, and he predicts increased urban flooding if current rainfall trends continue. Li adds that reservoirs are more likely to flood, as well, drinking water may be negatively affected, and mudslide activity may increase. The Water Resources Bureau is working on a draft plan that would pay individuals to move out of low-lying areas particularly prone to flooding. Li says that flooding and earthquakes are the disasters that keep him awake at night. He adds that following disasters, the NCDR has been asked by members of the Executive and Legislative Yuans to explain why it was not able to predict, for instance, that a given bridge would collapse. Li responds that the NCDR must cooperate more closely with other Taiwan agencies and local authorities to ascertain the stability and resiliency of infrastructure. He adds that due to bureaucratic difficulties and unclear lines of control, effective cooperation with local authorities is the most difficult challenge the NCDR faces.

19. (C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: AIT appreciates the planned visit of FEMA Deputy Administrator Manning to Taiwan this fall. Apart from attending the conference, we would recommend an expanded program that could include new areas of bilateral cooperation in this field. If there is interest, we would be glad to explore with Taiwan NCDR officials possible subjects for study and exchange. END COMMENT AND

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ACTION REQUEST.  
WANG